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ABSTRACT

New federal and state legislation calling for environmental education creates the opportunity for outdoor educators to become an active part of the K-12 educational system. This will require that the outdoor educational community modify their professional training at the post-secondary level as well as understand the formal educational system. An outdoor educator must be competent in three general areas: (1) physical skills; (2) understanding of ecological relationships beyond minimum impact; and (3) interpersonal skills. The three general areas of knowledge are combined to propose a model for outdoor education leading to environmental literacy. The teaching license is the essential credential that shows the educational community that the person has been trained to the accepted standards of formal education. Specific course work in outdoor education teaching methods and theory should also be included in the pre-service educators' training. The State of Minnesota has recently passed a law mandating that all students who receive an education in Minnesota be environmentally literate when they graduate from high school. Environmental literacy includes an understanding of ecological relationships, a knowledge of pollution and solutions to prevent it, and humans' effect on the environment. Adventure-based education is a valid teaching method for gaining an awareness of the outdoors. (KS)

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OUTDOOR EDUCATORS AND K-12 EDUCATION: MAKING THE CONNECTION

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About the author: Ken Gilbertson is the founder of the Outdoor Program as well as the author of the academic training program at University Minnesota-Duluth. He earned his PhD in Outdoor Education with an emphasis in clinical counseling from the Ohio State University in 1990. His Masters degree in Outdoor Education was earned in 1984 from the University of Minnesota-Duluth. He also holds an undergraduate degree in teaching Life Science with a Minnesota teaching license. Additional experience includes work within the formal K-12 educational system as well as extensive experience in the informal educational system such as that provided by Outward Bound, the U.S. Forest Service, and nature centers throughout Minnesota.

Abstract: Outdoor education has traditionally served a role of being adventure and/or informal education based. The relationship of outdoor educators with formal (K-12) school systems has been that of being primarily a provider of partial day field trip experiences. Thus, the outdoor educator has tended to serve as a resource to the formal educational system on a temporary basis within the school year. The opportunity exists for outdoor educators to become an active part of the K-12 educational system. This can be accomplished by providing an undergraduate college training (pre-service) that includes a philosophical comprehension of outdoor education as it applies to the formal education system; by providing a training in education that results in a state accredited teaching licensure; by outdoor education centers providing in-service education with a direct application to curricula to school teachers. This proposal has implications for education at all levels. This also requires that outdoor educators work within the traditional scope of the educational system.

Introduction

The 1990s are being seen as the decade of the environment. It is clear that this recognition is one that should neither be taken lightly nor treated as a passing phenomenon. The importance of having an environmentally literate public is placing new demands on the professionals who are looked upon as the ones who can best effect this need. Of those professionals, outdoor educators play a vital role.

The National Environmental Education Act (S. 3176, 1990) calls for an education and training in environmental education at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels on a national and international level. In addition, individual states are creating laws requiring environmental education training for students. Although the language in these laws includes the non-formal education sector, they are clearly emphasizing the formal (K-12 and post-secondary) educational sector.

Outdoor educators have tended to serve as resources outside the formal education system. They have provided facilities and instruction on a predominantly partial day field trip type basis

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in a temporary capacity within the school year. (Gilbertson, 1990; Swan, 1985b) This role has been inadequate because the duration of actual contact with individual students is too short. In addition, teachers are not providing adequate education toward the environment in the classroom. (Gilbertson, 1990; International Joint Commission, 1977)

Outdoor educators have the opportunity to affect the environmental literacy of the public by becoming an active member of the formal educational system. They can do this because of their unique experience and understanding toward the outdoors. However, the outdoor educational community will need to modify their training of professionals at the post-secondary level as well as gain an understanding of the formal educational system.

Outdoor Education Model

Outdoor education is an eclectic field that teaches an awareness of and understanding toward the natural environment using a variety of disciplines and methods. It is a field that is both social and ecological. (Priest, 1986) Thus, an outdoor educator must be competent in three general areas: (a) the physical skills, (b) understanding of ecological relationships beyond minimum impact, and (c) interpersonal skills. The fundamental approach to these areas is direct experience (see Figure 1).

The physical skills required to enable a person to enjoy the outdoors demands a specific training of the teacher. This includes an ability to model and teach minimum impacts on the land. An understanding of ecological relationships is essential if the student/teacher is to understand responsible behavior toward the land. This understanding goes beyond a knowledge of rules applied to a specific area of travel. Yet, it is the deliberate abilities of the instructor as an educator that blends the skills abilities with biological understanding. The abilities to draw on diverse teaching methods enables an instructor to facilitate a group's cohesion as well as strengthen individual members' experience. Use of direct experience is simply good teaching because the learner is doing what they are being taught.

The result is a training that includes education in fundamental physical skills. Fundamental skills development must be prioritized over more advanced skills. An analogy is that of a varsity football coach teaching pre-service physical educators varsity level football when they will actually be teaching football basics to students who will likely never be members of a formal football squad. It also includes a training in field biology. Finally, students should receive their formal teaching training through an accredited program where they will receive a license to teach, whether it be elementary or secondary education.

The teaching licensure is the essential credential that shows the educational community that the person has been trained to the accepted standards of formal education. It is also the deliberate means of receiving training to be an educator. Specific course work in outdoor education teaching methods and theory should also be included in the pre-service educators training.

Approximately one-fourth of the students enrolled at the University of Minnesota-Duluth Outdoor/Environmental Education academic program are professionals who are returning to college to receive their teaching licensure. They have found that without this credential it is very difficult to work with the formal educational system.

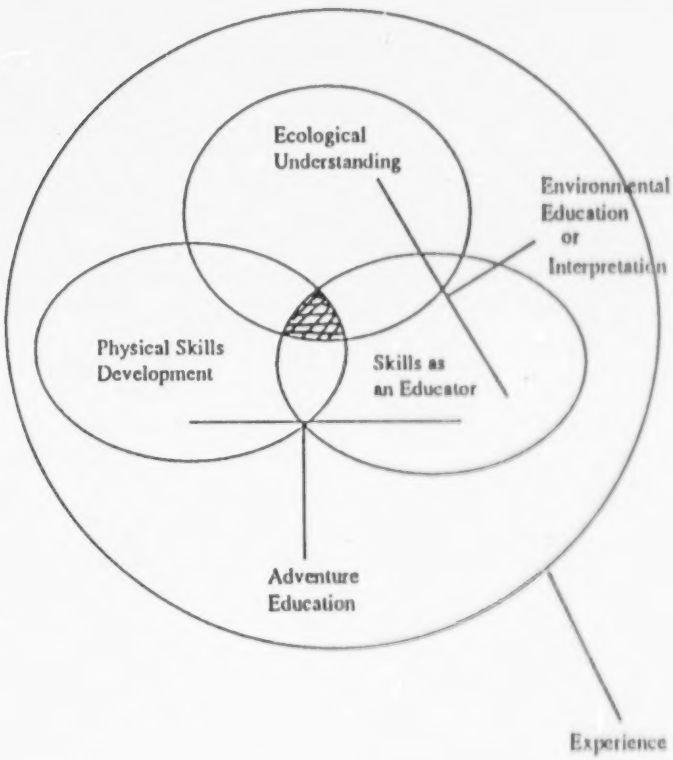

Figure 1. A model of outdoor education: Components leading to environmental literacy.

The State of Minnesota has recently passed a law (1990) mandating that all students who receive an education in Minnesota should be environmentally literate when they graduate from high school. Environmental literacy includes an understanding of ecological relationships, a knowledge of pollution and solutions to prevent it, and human's effect on the environment. This goal of creating an environmentally literate citizen follows the belief that attitudes and knowledge toward the environment affect one's behavior. An environmentally literate citizen is one who behaves toward the environment in a responsible manner (Roth, 1969; Sia, 1985/86). The National Environmental Education Act also strives toward the environmentally literate citizen.

The language in these bills emphasizes K-12 education. It does not refer to physical skills or physical education as would be found in adventure-based education or outdoor recreation. However, Gilbertson (1990) found that most of the nature centers in Minnesota use adventure-based education on their sites. They referred to the use of physical skills as *attractors* to get students involved. Consider also the extent that school groups specifically request time on

facilities such as climbing walls, ropes courses, etc. The conclusion can be made that adventure-based education is an essential component effecting environmental literacy, that it is a valid teaching method toward gaining an awareness toward the outdoors, and that it is under utilized as a deliberate teaching method.

Another attribute of having a teaching license and providing teacher training is that the outdoor educator gains insight into the formal education system. This understanding is essential when working with teachers whether in an in-service capacity or in providing an opportunity for students. How one approaches a lesson for a formal school group is distinctly different than an informal group. This should not be confused with quality of education.

An attribute that an outdoor educator can provide that is different from a classroom teacher is that of being familiar with and understanding education that takes place in the field. Most classroom teachers are uncomfortable with classroom management, subject material, and logistics that are involved in providing a field experience. In addition, few schools have adequate acreage and biodiversity to provide a quality outdoor educational lesson. Thus, the outdoor educator plays a very important role in the educational process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the unique training that a person who is trained as an outdoor educator is essential as a part of the educational process in striving toward an environmentally literate student. By gaining a more thorough training in education, and by understanding the formal educational system, outdoor educators have an opportunity to become active members in the K-12 educational process. This opportunity holds implications at the levels of elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education as well as within the informal educational community of interpretation and adventure education.

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